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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR EAP/TC, H-LMO Peter Su
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SUBJECT: Congressman Kennedy and Vatican Representative in
Taiwan Discuss Cross-Strait Religious Issues

1. (SBU) Congressman Mark Kennedy (R-MN) met with Apostolic Nunciature Charge D'affaires Monsignor Ambrose Madtha on June 6, 2005. Madtha estimated there were currently 300,000 Catholics in Taiwan and 5-10 new priests came out of Taiwan's seminaries every year. Growth of the Catholic population in Taiwan has been fairly slow, but the Church has not been involved in active evangelization. Madtha stated there were 16 million Catholics in Mainland China, 12 million of whom were practicing underground. When asked about the Catholic Church's position in the Mainland, Madtha replied that the Vatican had had some problems with Beijing. The most problematic issue had been Beijing's insistence on choosing its own bishops, an "internal issue" in the eyes of the PRC government. Pope John Paul II's canonization of Chinese martyrs on October 1, 2000 also caused a severe rift in bilateral relations

2. (SBU) Congressman Kennedy asked about rumors that the Vatican might shift diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to the PRC and how such a shift would affect relations with Taiwan. Madtha asserted that these rumors were unfounded and that he personally had not heard of any changes to come. He also stated that even if a shift occurred, relations with Taiwan would not change much, because the Vatican valued Taiwan's respect for freedom of religion.

3. (U) Congressman Kennedy's office has cleared this message.

PAAL